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Leadership Competency Series

THE SAGA OF 'YOGA'

Yoga for self-management and leadership

The internal discipline of self- perfection, manifests itself in the external achievements of a leader who has mastered the art of self-management through Yoga, writes M R Chandramowly.

CEO :Good evening Guruji. Ah! Is it not a wonderful evening?

GURU :Come in my friend. It is indeed a pleasant evening, though the cold wind seldom tickle your tips and toes. Have a seat. Haven't seen you for a few weeks now. You look more relaxed than usual and buoyant today. Any major break through?

CEO : Yes Guruji, it is certainly a major one. This time, it is not in my organisation, it is in my 'self.'

GURU : Is that so? What is going on, any way?

CEO : I participated in a seven day Yoga work session. It was wonderful driving as early as four in the morning and doing those Pranayams and Asanas in a group of over ten thousand people. I lost three kilograms, I feel fresh even after 14 hours of work. It was wonderful to hear the orchestral hiss of twenty thousand lungs breathing out at the master's command.

GURU : So, you have been there. Correct me if I am wrong, as I know, you have already attended more than three or four different Yoga related courses.I remember you talked about Kriyas, Asanas, Kapala bhathi and so on. Is this course something different?

CEO : Yes and no. What we did in the course was nothing new. It was quite the same. But, it was executed differently. The master is a great driver of practicality and he never left us sitting idle for more than two minutes. He continuously goads and declares "nothing happens to you by studying, explaining or appreciating yoga. You get the benefit of Yoga only by practising it." Then we would go back to bending and breathing in, continuing the practice.

GURU : I am glad to know that finally you have discovered the joy and secret of healthy living. It is unfortunate that the subject has not yet got its place in the study of management.

Look, today the majority of our population is attacked by two demonic forces. One enters our body in the form of polluted and junk food and the other one is what is received by our mind - negative thoughts, crime news and similar lead stories, ego clashes at home or at office and the confusion in value adoption which leads to stress. Stress on the body and mind reduces your leadership power and influence.

CEO : How do you connect Yoga to Leadership? I did not think of it at all while practicing Yoga, but I feel quite happy and more comfortable. I know these thoughts are connected holistically but it is not clear to me. I know that stress is bad. With anger or fear, blood flows into our face, hands and legs, which results in impulses prompting us to shout, cry, fight etc. At that point in time, the neo-cortical…

GURU : Yes. The neo-cortical response slows down. Which means, your intellectual capability crashes and fails to discriminate, as a consequence of which you are driven to immediate action by your impulses. The Pranayama which you have learnt, saves you from such attacks. Deep and slow breathing is the basis of long life. I am sure you know the connection of breathing to longevity. A tortoise respires five times per minute, we respire about 15 times a minute and a pigeon respires over 34 times per minute. The tortoise lives longer than us and we live longer than a pigeon. They say that one who practices pranayama regularly breathes not more than 8 times in a minute.

CEO : We breathe all the time.Then why should we do this Pranayama which is just breathing in and breathing out exercises? And how does it benefit us?

GURU :The secret lies in the fact that whatever you do consciously has more value than what you do unconsciously. For instance, if you sleep with a Rs 500 rupee note folded in your closed fist and if your fist opens while you are deep in sleep and the currency falls into the open hand of your friend who is also asleep by your side. Would you claim that you have donated that money to your friend? The action is not supported by consciousness and hence it is ineffective. Similarly, when you breath consciously, it brings in the effect by producing positive secretions needed to keep your whole body in perfect balance. When you perform the ‘Kapala bhati’ Pranayam, you puff out toxins from your body besides, making your mind pleasant and worry free. If you do this with more commitment and awareness, you rejuvenate your lungs, heart and brain and destabilize the ill effect of adrenaline released by stress.

CEO : Yes Guruji. I have read about the release of harmful adrenaline in our body when we are in an emotional state. I recall Dr H R Nagendra’s interesting and scientific narration of what happens in our body as a reaction to stress.

GURU : Dr Nagendra, of Yoga Research Foundation? Yes, what did he say?

CEO : Due to stress, the stored sugar and fats pour into the blood-stream to fuel up for quick energy. The breath rate shoots up demanding more oxygen. Red blood cells flood the blood stream, carrying more oxygen to the muscles of the limbs and brain. The Heart speeds up, ensuring sufficient blood supply and our BP soars. The Blood-clotting

mechanism is activated to protect against injury (if not, we would bleed to death in a few minutes after an injury).Digestion ceases, perspiration and saliva increase. Triggered by the pituitary gland, the endocrine system steps up hormone production. Bowel and bladder muscles loosen. The pupils dilate and allow more light to enter. All the senses are heightened.

GURU : Stop, Stop! Ultimately, the heart fails to function isn't it? Our discussion on management is to enhance health and happiness and not to elaborate the negatives beyond a gentle caution. It is now being scientifically established that Yogic practices release stress by acting as stimulants to the four stress levels (circulation of blood, heart beat, pulse and blood pressure). The nervous system is brought to normal by becoming calm and reaching a deeper layer of relaxation. When the mind opens up towards infinite, elevating serene and peace, the finite problems at the mental levels too drop down like dry leaves.

Self-management

Managing the 'self' is the key to Leadership. The first step in managing the self is to understand it. Understanding, Analysing and Causation forms a scientific basis for a strong commitment to correcting our life styles. It is left to an individual what method one would like to follow. Be it Yoga, Pranayama, Aerobics, Gymnastics or Zen, it is evident that one soon discovers what benefits the self. These maintenance activities are a must for healthy, happy and longer living. Moreover, committed practice will enhance our ability to manage ourselves better.

Self-Management can be defined as the capability to deal with a variety of situations to accomplish objectives and tasks. A leader, who is an expert in 'self management,' uses his inner drive and past experience to get things done, which improves performance. He makes sound decisions and presents opinions effectively. He manages personal emotions and that of others. He learns to recognise the impact of his own behaviour and language on others.

Various levels

When you want to rank people in terms of display of their degree of self management competency, a Level 1 Manager acts with self direction but selects only safe actions. A Level 2 Manager regulates his own behaviour and takes calculated risks, solving problems without much consultation. At Level 3, a Manager chooses challenges and never loses his focus on situations. He also drives his team with such challenges. At Level 5, he manages no more. He leads and demonstrates the courage of choosing extremely challenging situations, displaying low stress levels and high energy levels.

While interacting with leaders of different organisations in my consultation work of leadership competency building, I have noticed that, ' Self Management' has become a key leadership competency, which is increasingly becoming critical in the face of stressful work life. Interviews with people reveal more situations of having 'no time to stand and

stare, struggling in balancing money and pleasure, work-life imbalance, the strain of running the rat race, of acquiring more and more.' Most of them realize the fact that, one may win the race but, after the race one remains a wealthy rat. A rat who ends up spending all the wealth gained in trying to regain its lost health, in vain.

Is it impossible to balance the challenges posed by life? Is there any state of mind between deep interest and disinterest in order to achieve balanced leadership? Is it possible to carry the heavy load of professional and personal baggage, and at the same time maintain a feather light heart within oneself?

Attached to the outside world, and total dispassion within.

Busily engaged out, and no attachment set in

Burden of the world out, while heart is light and thin

So is the blessed path of Yoga for Leaders, out and in (Dr D V G's Kagga : 773)

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